

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 SCCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04

H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 EB-07 DOTE-00 FAA-00 CAB-02 WRD-01

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FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6262

INFO AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

S E C R E T ROME 3931

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR, IT, LY, AG

SUBJECT: ARREST OF SUSPECTED LIBYAN TERRORISTS

REF: ROME 3836

1. MFA OFFICIAL IN CHARGE OF ARAB AFFAIRS (ATTOLICO) HAS BROUGHT US UP TO DATE ON DEVELOPMENTS RELATING TO THE ARREST OF THREE ARABS AT FIUMICINO AIRPORT ON MARCH 6, ONE OF WHOM WAS IN POSSESSION OF A QUANTITY OF WEAPONS. THE ITALIANS ARE CONVINCED THAT THE THREE ARE LIBYAN AGENTS ON A MISSION TO KIDNAP LIBYAN FOREIGN MINISTER AL-HONI.

2. MFA IS NOT AWARE OF ANY INFORMATION THAT THE INVESTIGATING MAGISTRATE HAS BEEN ABLE TO OBTAIN FROM THE THREE, AND BELIEVES IT EXCEEDINGLY UNLIKELY THAT THE TRIO WILL PROVIDE ANY USEFUL INFORMATION WHILE UNDERGOING INTERROGATION. AT THE PRESENT TIME THE INVESTIGATIVE AND JUDICIAL PROCESS IS BEING PERMITTED TO TAKE ITS NORMAL COURSE.

3. ACTING BOTH IN TRIPOLI AND IN ROME, THE LIBYAN GOVERNMENT
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HAS FORMALLY DENIED THAT THE THREE ARE AMONG ITS EMPLOYEES,

HAVE REQUESTED THAT THEY BE TURNED OVER TO LIBYAN AUTHORITIES FOR PROSECUTION ON CHARGES OF ACTIVITIES HARMFUL TO THE LIBYAN STATE, AND HAVE ASKED THAT THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT MUZZLE THE LOCAL PRESS WHICH IS ACCUSED OF SEEKING TO HARM ITALIAN-LIBYAN BILATERAL RELATIONS BY THE PUBLICATION OF SCURRILOUS ARTICLES ABOUT THE INCIDENT. THE LIBYANS HAVE ALSO ALLEGED THAT THE ENTIRE AFFAIR WAS ENGINEERED BY A FOREIGN POWER (PRESUMABLY EGYPT) AIMED AT DISCREDITING LIBYA INTERNATIONALLY. THE LIBYAN AMBASSADOR SOUGHT AND RECEIVED AN APPOINTMENT ON MARCH 8 WITH PRIME MINISTER MORO TO RAISE THE ABOVE POINTS. IN THE BRIEF MEETING, MORO INDICATED THAT THE ITALIANS DO NOT WISH TO HARM BILATERAL RELATIONS, BUT THIS IS A JUDICIAL MATTER WHICH MUST BE PERMITTED TO RUN ITS NORMAL COURSE. REGARDING THE PRESS, MORO TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT THIS WAS SOMETHING OUTSIDE THE CONTROL OF THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT.

4. IN A CONVERSATION WITH ATTOLICO SUBSEQUENT TO THE INCIDENT, AL-HONI SAID THAT HE HAS BEEN AWARE FOR SOME TIME THAT QADHAFI WOULD LIKE TO EFFECT HIS RETURN IN ONE MANNER OR ANOTHER TO LIBYA. HE IS CONVINCED THAT THIS INCIDENT IS RELATED TO THESE EFFORTS. AL-HONI SAID THAT THE THREE MEN INVOLVED ARE MEMBERS OF THE LIBYAN MILITARY. TWO OF THEM HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN IN LONDON IN PURSUIT OF MAJOR MEHEISHA. THEY THEN PROCEEDED TO CAIRO WHERE THEY WERE IN TOUCH WITH THE LIBYAN EMBASSY. THEY WERE JOINED IN CAIRO BY THE THIRD INDIVIDUAL (MOHAMED, WHO CARRIED THE DIPLOMATIC PASSPORT AND THE WEAPONS). AL-HONI FURTHER CHARGED THAT THE TICKETS FOR THE TRIO WERE PURCHASED BY THE LIBYAN EMBASSY AT CAIRO AND THAT THE THREE WERE TRANSPORTED TO THE CAIRO AIRPORT BY A LIBYAN AGENT WHO HAS SINCE RETURNED TO TRIPOLI. FOR THE MOMENT AL-HONI DOES NOT WISH TO BURN HIS BRIDGES WITH LIBYA ON THE PREMISE THAT QADHAFI WILL EITHER CHANGE HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD HIM OR BE REMOVED BY A COUP. MEANWHILE, TO THE DISTRESS OF THE ITALIAN MINISTRY OF INTERIOR WHICH IS PROVIDING HIS SECURITY AND THE HOTEL MANAGEMENT, AL-HONI IS LIVING AT ROME'S HILTON HOTEL. HE APPARENTLY INTENDS TO REMAIN IN ROME FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE.

5. ATTOLICO REVEALED THAT THE ALGERIAN GOVERNMENT HAS MADE A REPRESENTATION IN THE CASE IN SUPPORT OF THE POSITION OF
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THE LIBYAN GOVERNMENT. THE ITALIANS INTEND TO REJECT THE REPRESENTATION AS AN UNWARRANTED INTERVENTION IN MATTERS WHICH DO NOT CONCERN OR RELATE TO THE ALGERIANS.

6. COMMENT. JUDGING FROM OUR CONVERSATION WITH ATTOLICO, WE HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD LIKE TO BE DONE WITH THE MATTER IN AS PAINLESS A MANNER AS POSSIBLE. HAD THE LIBYANS NOT DISCLAIMED MOHAMED AND NOT MADE THE POINT

THAT HIS DIPLOMATIC PASSPORT WAS FALSE, THE ITALIANS MIGHT HAVE BEEN OBLIGED TO RECOGNIZE THAT AS THE BEARER OF A DIPLOMATIC PASSPORT TRANSITTING ROME ON OFFICIAL BUSINESS HE WOULD HAVE HAD IMMUNITY UNDER THE VIENNA CONVENTION. ATTOLICO NOTED THAT THE ITALIAN CASE AGAINST THE OTHER TWO IS LESS STRONG SINCE THEY DID NOT HAVE ANY WEAPONS IN THEIR POSSESSION AND THEY APPARENTLY PASSED THROUGH THE SECURITY DEVICES SEPARATELY FROM MOHAMED. VOLPE

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